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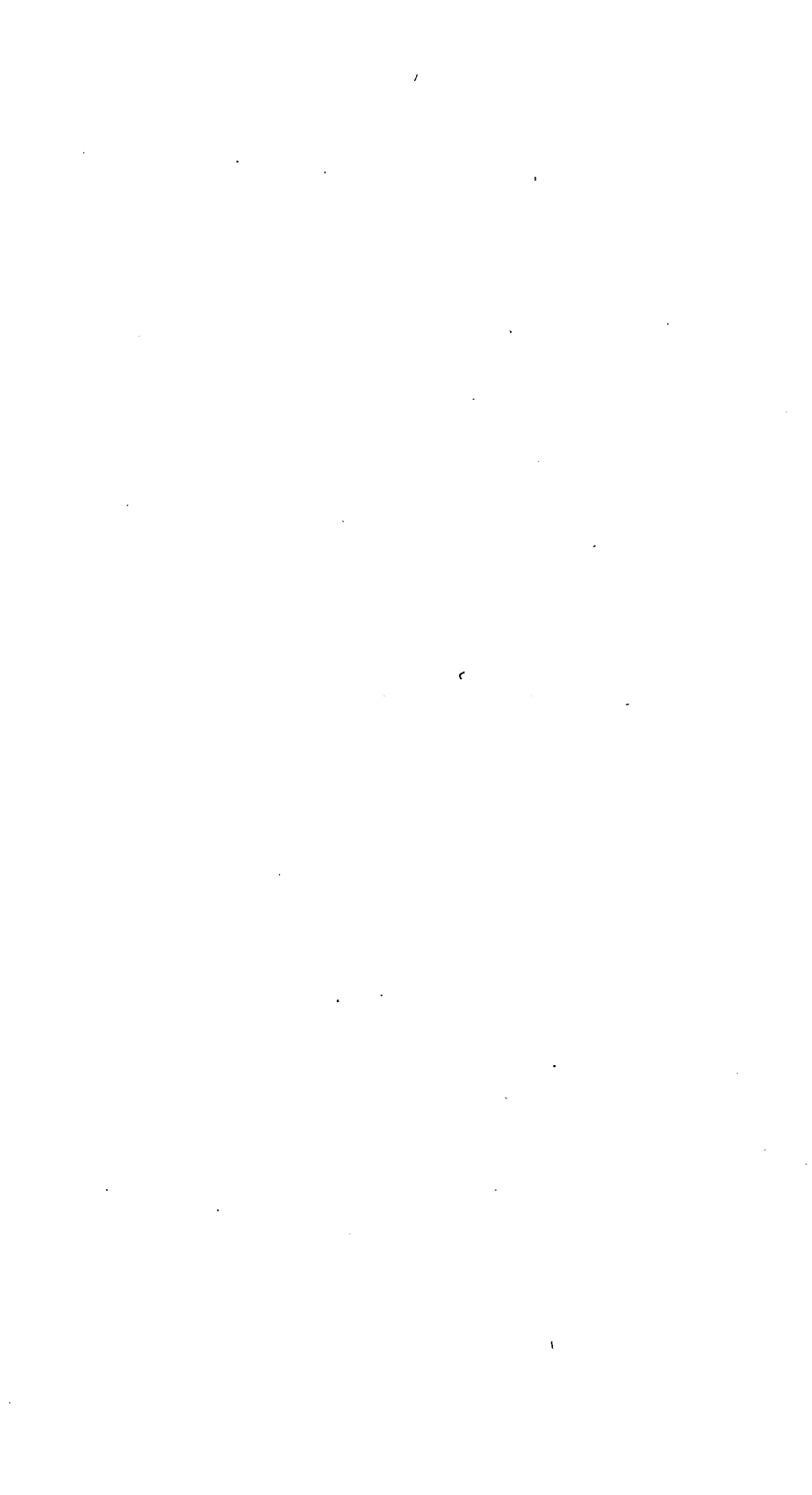
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HINTS TO PARENTS:

A

SERMON

ON THE

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

BY GARDINER SPRING,

**PASTOR OF THE BRICK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE CITY OF
NEW-YORK.**

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SERMON.

EPHESIANS vi, 4.

"And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

WHOEVER turns his thoughts toward the construction of human society, will be convinced that the religious education of children constitutes one of the great means of grace and salvation. It is in the power of parents, with the blessing of God, to do more to prevent the declension of vital piety, to suppress the prevalence of religious errors, to advance the interests of truth and godliness, to reform and save the world, than can be accomplished by any other means.

I speak of a *religious education*. And yet there are so many things that ultimately go into the account of a religious education, and exert a powerful, though indirect influence in forming the moral character, that to confine my remarks to that course of education which is purely religious, would be to take a very limited view of the subject. The inquiry we present to your consideration is, *What is the nurture to which the Word of God and sound*

experience direct us, that is most likely to result in the salvation of our children? To answer this inquiry, as fully as it ought to be answered, would require a volume, instead of a single discourse. I can offer but a *few hints* on this important subject. My design in the following remarks, is to call your attention

To some particulars in the education of children, to which the efforts of parents should be specially directed;

To some of the measures to be adopted in the prosecution of these desirable ends; and

To some of the encouragements and motives to the faithful performance of this parental duty.

I. I will call your attention to some particulars in the education of children, to which the attention of parents should be specially directed.

And here I remark,

One of these is, *the habit of subordination*. Subjection to authority is the ordinance of God; and if there is a sphere where it ought to maintain its perfect and unbroken influence, it is the family. The God of nature has subjected the years of childhood and youth to parental control; nor can this wise and benevolent constitution be inverted, without jeopardizing the best interests of our children for time and eternity. The habit of subordination is one of the happiest preservatives from a thousand evils. The spirit that consults a parent's wishes; that reluctates from violating a parent's authority;

that prefers to sacrifice its own gratification, to a parent's choice; is not only one of the strongest shields that can be thrown around the youthful character, but forms one of the links in the chain that often leads to early piety. Though it is not every dutiful child that is pious, yet it is much more probable that such a child will become so, than one of an obstinate, unbending temper. "If it be true, that there are more pious women than men, it is to be ascribed very much to this circumstance, that they are more habituated to restraint and subjection."

A *sacred regard to truth* is also a habit of the first importance to be instilled into the mind of a child. In this respect there is a great difference in the disposition of children. I have seen those who rarely, if ever, told a falsehood; and I have seen those who seem to be born with a lying tongue. It is wonderful to see how the early habit of extravagant and false representations cleaves to the human character; and it is mournfully affecting to know how strong a barrier it throws in the way of holiness and heaven. Children should be taught the immense importance of always speaking the truth; and should be made to feel, that love, confidence, and honor; or, detestation, distrust, and disgrace, will follow them, as they are observant or regardless of the claims of veracity. Every false declaration, every art of conceal-

ment and dissimulation, every strong statement, every broken promise, only hardens the heart, sears the conscience, and opens another avenue to the seductions of the adversary; while on the other hand, truth, pure truth, with all its simplicity and loveliness, forms the foundation of every moral virtue.

The *habit of industry* is also one which deserves early and particular consideration. Industrious habits exert a happy influence on the intellectual and moral character. Many a youth has been rescued from disgrace and ruin, because he had no time for amusements and dissipation; and many a one has been lost to himself, to his family, to the world, and to God, because he had nothing else to do, but yield himself a prey to self-indulgence. If we would guide our children in the paths of piety and peace; if we have our eye on their best interests, for this world and that which is to come; we shall educate them in some useful employment. Even in man's primeval integrity and innocence, he was not exempt from toil; and who, since the apostacy, can escape with impunity, the force of that universal sentence, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread, until thou return to the ground?" There is no small difficulty, especially in large cities, in educating children in the habits of industry. It is indeed one of the most serious difficulties with which families who reside in large cities are

called to contend. The great reason why vice so successfully allures the youth of large cities, is, that during their early education, and in seasons of relaxation from study, there is nothing to occupy their time. And hence the remark, that the great mass of men of character and standing in our large cities, are not native citizens. It deserves to be seriously considered, whether the wide difference existing between families brought up under the same religious instruction, may not be ascribed to the fact, that some are educated in habits of industry, and some in habits of idleness. It is a sad mistake in parents to educate their children, merely for spheres of splendid accomplishment. I am no enemy to refinement; nor am I insensible of the happy influence which courtesy and elegance exert on the intellectual and moral character. But I have yet to learn, that these may not be combined with habits of industry and enterprise. Dissipation or despondency uniformly take the place of active employment in the youthful mind.

Rigid temperance is inseparable from a good education. If a youth cannot be induced to abstain *utterly* from the use of ardent spirits, there is little hope that he will become a pious or respectable man. This is an indulgence which will eventually involve him in distress and ruin. The course of transgression may, for a time, be easy and pleasant enough, but the end must be disaster. The infatuated man who is gliding

down the stream that conducts him to a precipice, is not in a situation more dangerous, than the youth who ventures upon this allowed course. He may regale his eye with the beauty of the landscape; and his ear may be charmed with the melody of song; his little bark may glide over the bosom of the unruffled stream, and the soft gale of pleasure may gently fill his sail: but the roar of the cataract will soon fall upon his ear, and the yawning abyss will ingulph him. Health, intellect, character, usefulness, comfort, property, conscience, and the soul, are all sacrificed at the shrine of this worse than pagan deity. No one sin of which a youth can be guilty, puts him at such an awful remove from the influence of motives; no one so completely obliterates the moral sense; no one renders its victim so unmindful of the sanctions and obligations of eternity as this. The mind is the medium of access to the heart. Our children must think, and feel, and consider, before they will repent, and pray, and love. But where is the individual who is so unpromising a subject for these reflections, as the youth, who "tarries long at the wine, and goes to seek mixed wine?" If the God of all the earth has constituted parents the immediate guardians of their children's happiness and virtue, and hopes, let them beware how they sow the seeds of intemperance in infancy, and nurture them in childhood; for they are fruitful seeds, and prolific in death.

Another topic worthy of the serious consideration of parents in the moral training of their offspring, is *the selection of their associates*. This I know, cannot always be under parental control. In the earlier ages even of youth, it would be wise, if they were satisfied with few associates beyond the domestic circle. Their employment, if possible, should be at home; their relaxation should be at home; and their amusements ought never to be of that dissipated character, that would bring reproach upon a well-governed and religious family. Parents may be under the necessity of submitting to self-denial and expense, in order that the amusements of their children should be found at their own firesides; but if by a few sacrifices they can purchase the habit of domestic retirement, scarcely any price is too dear, that does not convert the domestic circle into scenes of extravagance and dissipation. Every family ought to be a little world within itself. Absolute exclusion from the world is undesirable; but if I mistake not, those families are best educated, and exhibit most of moral feeling, that are most tenderly attached to *home*. The most critical period of human life is between fifteen and twenty years of age. And it is at this period especially, when young persons begin to extend their acquaintance with the world, that parents will find it inexpressibly advantageous to have preserved the cords of domestic endearment so bright and strong, that

they can easily draw an affectionate child away from snares, and bind him to his natal bower. Many a youth has been saved from ruin in this world, and perdition in the next, by a fond attachment to the scenes and associations of early life. No matter how far a child may be removed from the immediate influence of parental control; so long as this amiable sentiment swells his bosom, and fills his eye, and glows in his correspondence, these cords of love will keep him from falling. Companions that are idle and vicious, that are ignorant and sceptical, will be sure to poison the unsuspecting mind of youth. It is in the circle of such associates, that the hopes of many a parent have found a grave. It is there, that example persuades; argument encourages; exhortation stimulates; flattery deceives; ridicule mocks; and all that is social and sympathetic in man is pressed into the service of sin. Parents may never forget that "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise," but that the "companion of fools shall be destroyed."

Another particular of high importance in the education of children, is *the regard due to the Sabbath*. I have never known a man of sterling virtue who disregarded the claims of this sacred day. Let a child be allowed to make light of the obligations of this holy season, and regularly as it returns to bless the world, put himself beyond the reach of its smiles; and there is little reason to hope he will become the heir

of heaven. If there is but one lesson a parent can instill into the mind of his child, let that lesson be, the fourth commandment. Let a child be taught to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy; and into what a sphere of moral influences is he at once thrown; by what a circumvallation that separates from snares and death is he surrounded; and how near is he brought to the kingdom of heaven! I doubt whether it is possible for a child, early taught to reverence the Sabbath, ever to become an abandoned man, without first breaking through the restraints of this sacred day. But I remark

It is a consideration of moment, that children should be *judiciously instructed in the estimate they form of this world*. A multitude of pious parents instill into the minds of their children much too fervid a zeal for advancement in the world. As a matter of prudence and discretion, the spirit of the world is so anxiously infused into their minds, that the great object of their pursuit insensibly becomes the attainment of wealth and honor. We do not mean that parents should feel no solicitude for the character and condition of their children in the present life. It becomes them to be anxious to see their children qualified for usefulness and respectability of character; to urge them to unbending fidelity in their profession, whatever it may be; and to inspire them with that generous love of excellence, that ardent desire of good, that shall aim at distinction in

the best sense of the word. It is not an easy matter in the practical lessons of every day, for parents to draw the line between that love of distinction which the gospel requires, and that which is the offspring of a supremely selfish and worldly heart. It is very natural for them to smile upon their children whenever they discover in them a spirit that is eagerly set on worldly good; that is shrewd and overreaching; and thus to leave the impression on their minds, that in the estimation of their parents there is no good to be compared with this world. No doubt we all sin in this, and sin greatly against God and our children. It becomes parents to be incessantly watchful, lest they cultivate in the young bosoms where the love of God and heaven ought to predominate, no higher and nobler principle than the love of earth. If our children are taught, that the great business of men in the present world, is to heap up wealth, attain honors, and enjoy human life; what will be the probable termination of their career? Would we train them up for usefulness and heaven, they must often be told to put a low estimate upon every thing beneath the sun. They must not be excluded from the world, but taught how vain and empty a thing it is. The sooner a child is led to see that there is a higher object of pursuit than his own advancement; that there are more elevated and enduring joys, than the sordid and transitory pleasures of time and sense; that

popularity, power and wealth may all be attained, and yet he himself be left the miserable victim of disappointment and sorrow; the earlier do those principles take root in his mind, which bear fruit unto eternal life. It is of vast importance that this one thought should be lodged in the bosom of every child,—that the earnest desire of his parent's heart is to educate him not for enjoyment, but usefulness; not for this world, but the next; not for earth, but for heaven. If parents know themselves; if they know what is in the hearts of their children; they will always tremble for them in the prospect of high advancement. The wisdom that comes from above will lead them often to say to their child, as God did to the Prophet,—“*Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not.*”—Let children be taught that God sent them into the world to do their duty, to fill up their life with usefulness, and thus to honor his great name. Let this generous principle have its seat in their hearts, and a controlling influence on their lives; and more is accomplished for their real happiness, than though they were elevated to the thrones of princes, or became possessors of untold millions.

No small pains should be taken to *imbue the minds of children with a benevolent spirit*. This is a chord to which the conscience always vibrates. They should be taught to feel that a selfish spirit is a low, abject and mean spirit; and that there is none more elevated, more grand and

noble, than a benevolent and disinterested one. I know not any one thought from which the mind of a child or youth will receive a more wholesome direction than this. Let your children be taught the evil of a selfish, and the beauty and excellence of a disinterested spirit. Show them their obligation to regard the welfare of others. Form in them the habit of consulting the wishes and feelings of those with whom they have intercourse. Fix their minds upon objects that are great and good. Prepare them for enterprises of benevolence. Show them that *it is more blessed to give than to receive*, more pleasure in conferring a favor than accepting it, and more lasting joy in the enlarged, public spirit of the gospel, than the low, grovelling spirit of the world. Teach your child to rise above this grovelling principle, and to feel that there are interests greater than his own, and, if he has an enlarged and princely spirit, interests which he himself will be the happier for consulting. Let his grand enquiry be, not, What does my interest require? but what does my duty require? what does benevolence require? what does the spirit of kindness and disinterestedness require? what does God require? Teach him to despise a mean, contracted, selfish spirit, as one that is barren of every moral virtue, and prolific in every thing detestable and vicious. These suggestions lead me to add

The main object of attention in the education

of children, is *their religious character*. The late revered Thomas Scott, the author of the valuable Commentary on the Bible, who had been remarkably happy in the education of his family, being once requested to intimate to some of his friends, the method of education which he had been led to adopt, replied, "Few things are looked back on by me with less satisfaction, than my own conduct in respect to my children, except in one particular, which appears to have been the grand secret—and that is, that I have always *sought for them*, as well as for myself, in *the first place*, the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Happy parent! happy children! where the "kingdom of God and his righteousness," take the precedence in every plan and arrangement for human life! Who does not discover the wisdom, the piety, the parental affection, the controlling influence of such a course of moral training. To the religious character of our children, every thing else ought to be made subservient. The high privilege and obligation of parents is, to "bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Whatever others may say, or do, Christian parents should choose for their children, that good part which shall not be taken from them. Every thing else should be to them, like the small dust of the balance. The weight of parental solicitude, the vigor of parental effort should be exhausted here. Our

children are heirs of immortality, creatures of responsibility, and rapidly advancing to the judgment-seat. Soon they will be upon the bed of death, from which they will ascend to heaven or descend to hell, as they have sought or rejected, followed or despised the great Redeemer. Whether the best and most faithful parents are not sinfully deficient in this great concern; whether the religion of the gospel occupies that place in the education of their children, which God has assigned to it, and its importance demands, are questions on which a Christian parent will often dwell with deep solicitude and solemnity. In the ordinary course of things, our children will not become pious without our own painful and persevering effort. We do not expect them to become skilful in the arts, or learned in the sciences, or useful in the world, without anxious attention on the part of parents, to encourage and advance them. And if we hope to see them the children of God, they should distinctly understand, that, in our estimation, their religious character absorbs and eclipses every other design of parental love.

Such are some of the particulars in the education of children, to which the efforts of parents ought to be specially directed. We pass

II. To speak of some of the measures to be adopted in the prosecution of these desirable ends.

What can parents effect in the attainment of

this mighty object? How shall they prosecute this great enterprise? By what measures may they hope to secure this unspeakable good to their children? To these enquiries, I reply,

1. Much is accomplished by *the force of example*. "Be *yourself*, what you wish your *child* to be," is perhaps the most weighty axiom in the education of children. Example influences, long before instruction can inform, or authority can bind. "Precept constrains; example allures. Precept compels; example persuades. Precept is a dead, example a living law." Especially has example influence over the young. Next to the law of conscience, it is the first law with which they are acquainted; and it often remains the strongest motive to action, after all other motives are forgotten. Children are imitative beings; and few persons are aware how soon they understand the import of what they see and hear. The example of an affectionate and watchful parent can scarcely fail of exerting a most insinuating and powerful influence. No child is too young to be the accurate observer of its parent's conduct, and to be purified, or contaminated, by his example. The remark cannot be too strongly enforced on parents, that however insensibly, they are incessantly moulding the minds, the habits, the character of their children, by the power of their example.

You do not mean that your child should

possess an unyielding, imperious, spirit; that he should be overbearing and contemptuous; or that he should be unkind, unamiable, and uncourteous. But what if he discovers in you a hasty, uncontrollable temper; what if he sees that you are haughty and disdainful; that you are fond of sharp contention, and disregard all the laws of kindness and courtesy: the effect will be, in spite of all your efforts, that your example will be the governing motive of his conduct. You do not wish to see your child idle and slothful, and afraid of toil and hardship. But what if you yourself are a man of fashion and leisure; what if your child suspects that you do not deem it reputable to labor; and that instead of redeeming your time, and being diligent and unwearied, you are satisfied with living at your ease: is it very probable, that your child will aspire to great activity, energy and usefulness? You desire that your child should be a man of honorable feeling and unbending veracity; that he should be punctual in his engagements, and thorough in his business. But, if while he hears you commending and extolling these virtues, he knows that you descend to what is little and mean; that you are disingenuous, equivocal, and false; that you are loose and immethodical: will not your habitual conduct be apt to have more influence with your child, than your most positive precepts? You wish your children to be discreet in the choice of their associates. But

what if you yourselves are devoted to dissipation and convivial intercourse; what if you occasionally resort to corrupt and corrupting society; what if you are sometimes allured to the theatre, enticed to the gambling table, overtaken at the brothel, or mellow at the bowl: is it not possible, that you are thus most effectually alluring your children to become the victims of sense and sin? You would not wish your child to be an atheist, or an infidel. But what if he hears you sometimes expressing your doubts, whether there be any such being as God; whether there be any difference between what is right and what is wrong, except what arises from custom, or education; whether there be a world of everlasting retribution; and whether, after all, the Bible may not be a cunningly devised fable: would it be surprising, if your child should be deeply imbued with this unhinging scepticism? You who profess to be Christian parents, wish to lead your children to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. But what if they discover, that you yourselves, are conformed to this world; that your great object is to be rich and splendid, and to seek the honor that cometh from men; that you are influenced more by the maxims of fashion and the approbation of the world, than by the approbation of God and the unerring judgment of his word: will you have any just ground for disappointment, if your example defeats your instructions?

The effect of example on the minds of children is very apt to be decisive. In habits of thinking, in demeanor, they yield insensibly to the almost omnipotent power of example. If the parent reverences the Scriptures and the Sabbath, his children will have the strongest inducements to do the same. If the parent is decent and respectful in his attendance upon divine institutions, his children will probably tread in his steps. If parents are pious, their children will have the strongest inducements to piety. If the piety of the parent is of a high order, his children, when they become pious, will not be satisfied without coming up to the standard of their parent's example. The peculiar traits of religious character which distinguish parents will be very apt to distinguish their children. If the parent attaches himself to any particular denomination of Christians, there you will generally find the child. Has the parent a name to live only; it is very apt to be so with the child. Does the parent, professing godliness, neglect the worship of God in his family; the child will probably neglect it too. The steadfastness or the inconstancy of the parent; his ardor, or his lukewarmness; his errors in doctrine and practice; his beneficence, or his parsimony; his co-operation with benevolent enterprises, or his opposition to them; his enlightened and benevolent zeal, or his blind and self-righteous fanaticism will be almost sure to tinge the views

and infuse itself into the spirit of his children. It becomes parents to see to it, that they do not defeat their instructions by their example. The absence of correct example is one great reason why they are so unsuccessful in the education of their children. Let parents remember, that they are habitually acting in the presence of their children; let them always exhibit in their presence, those habits of character which they wish them to acquire, and in such a way as to tempt their imitation; and if we mistake not, they will accomplish what no other efforts can attain for the welfare of their children, both in this world, and that which is to come. But

2. Much is accomplished in the education of children by *frequent and well-digested instruction*. Children are not merely creatures of imitation, who receive impressions from example, but creatures of intellect, who examine and judge of the impressions they receive, and hold them liable to confirmation or rejection, as they are enforced by parental instruction. There is no subject on which it is not the privilege of a parent to reason with his child. A child is gratified when he is convinced and informed. There are few subjects in relation to which I have been more remiss and negligent, than frequent and *familiar* conversation with my children. I have often addressed them, but it has been too much after the manner of *preaching*, and not sufficiently colloquial and familiar. I am persuaded that

this disposition of familiar and colloquial instruction should be tenderly and solicitously fostered by every parent. Your child should be made to feel, that you have a deep interest in informing his understanding, convincing his judgment, enlightening his conscience, and impressing his heart.

A child is a depraved being; and every system of education that does not recognise this mournful fact, must fail of its object. Who, that has observed the character of children, has not found them to possess a supremely selfish spirit; that they know no aim superior to self-indulgence; that they gradually become the slaves of low appetites, and unhallowed passions; and unless assiduously instructed in all those great principles of moral truth, that have a tendency to control and rectify this spirit of aberration, they will become giants in wickedness. But notwithstanding this melancholy truth, there is a redeeming quality, even in the character of those who "go astray from the womb." The great Creator has given to every child a *conscience*, whose proper office is to teach him the difference between right and wrong; to give him a sense of moral obligation; and to approve what is right, and condemn what is wrong, in his moral conduct. This is the faculty which constitutes a child a moral agent, and which makes the essential difference between him and the lower orders of creation. This

is the faculty with which the Scriptures have most to do, and with which ministers have most to do, in forming the characters of *men*; and this is the faculty with which parents have most to do in the religious education of *children*. One of the first things to which a parent ought to turn his attention, therefore, is the cultivation of an enlightened and tender conscience in his child. First of all, must a child be taught, that he is the creature of responsibility, and that there is something within his own bosom, that claims the right of judging, and approving or condemning his conduct. As soon as he is capable of knowing his relations to God, he should be made to feel his accountability to him, as the Governor and Judge of men. Parents are not apt to take sufficient pains to develop the mental powers of their children, on religious subjects. Very early may their minds be furnished with important truth. "What a *man* ought to know, he ought to *begin* to know while he is a child." The great moral principles which enlighten his conscience, and exert an influence over his character in adult years, ought to penetrate his dark mind, and begin to exert their power in the years of childhood. God has required of parents to be diligent in explaining the doctrines, and enforcing the duties that are revealed in the Bible. "And these words which I command thee, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them dili-

gently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." At a very early age, let children be taught the being, perfections, and government of God; the entire apostacy and alienation of the human heart from holiness; the method of redemption by Jesus Christ; the necessity of the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; the loveliness and beauty of religion; the joy and honors of an unreserved devotement to Jesus Christ; the precious promises which comfort, and sustain the godly, and the awful terrors which await the ungodly, in the world of everlasting retribution. The instruction given to them should be systematic and periodical; and it should be incidental and frequent. Let them early be made familiar with the Scriptures. Let their memories be stored with its history, its biography, its truths. Let them also be stored with easy and familiar catechisms, prayers, and sacred hymns. It cannot be too deeply regretted, that this ancient usage has fallen so much into disuetude. Let unwearied pains be taken to divert the attention of children from light and pernicious reading, to that which is profitable. I am thoroughly, and more and more persuaded, that the great mass of novels and plays exert a pernicious influence, both on the intellectual and moral

character. Let children be committed to teachers that will exert no unhallowed influence on their youthful minds, but the rather, an influence that shall charm and win them to the love of virtue and godliness. And thus let their minds be so pre-occupied with the best furniture, that they shall have little room for noxious and polluting guests. There is a backwardness in many parents to converse with their children on religious subjects, which is altogether inexcusable. They ought not indeed to *surfeit* their children with religious conversation. Every opportunity of instruction or expostulation should be well timed, and never made tedious. In conversing with them on the great subject of their soul's salvation, they should address them with all affection and tenderness, and urge and entreat them to flee from the wrath to come. Their children should see that *this* is a subject in which the hearts of their parents feel the deepest and most tender concern; a subject which draws tears from their eyes, and persuasion from their tongue; a subject on which all the ardor and strength of their affection flow forth in "thoughts that glow, and words that burn." To exert the happiest influence, in these respects, it were wise to select the seasons best adapted both to the state of our children's minds, and our own. There are seasons of embarrassment and tenderness, and there are seasons of exposure, in

the history of children, of which a wise parent will avail himself to address to them the most powerful and affecting expostulations. And there are seasons, when parents themselves think much, feel deeply, and pray earnestly, for the salvation of their children; and from such seasons, such feelings, and such prayers, they may repair with a delightful fulness of soul, to solemn and affecting interviews with their children, and with more than usual hopes of success. And these are services which *parents themselves* should perform. Of all the instruction best adapted to influence a child, the faithful efforts of a pious *father*, and still more, a godly *mother*, are most important. For the benevolent sympathy and faithfulness of many an humble and pious domestic, the children even of pious parents have reason for everlasting gratitude. To the faithful teachers of Sabbath schools, parents, and children, the church of God, and the world, are under obligations that may never be forgotten. But that parent who leaves her child to the instruction of her domestics; that parent who neglects the Christian education of his family at home, because he can shift the burden on a Sabbath school, has not solemnly reflected on the charge he has assumed; and little thinks what power the *parental relation* is capable of exerting over the character and destiny of his children.

3. It is a very important rule in the education of children, that *in all their conduct toward them, parents should endeavor to gain their confidence.* It is of the first importance that every child be convinced that his parent is *his best friend*: that there are none on whose devoted attachment he may place so much reliance; none who will do and suffer so patiently and so long for him, and who looks for no higher gratification or reward, than the good conduct and highest welfare of the children that God has given him. Parents cannot fail to have a strong hold upon the consciences and character of their children, when once they have lodged the thought within their bosoms that they seek their highest good; though this alone may not gain their confidence, or give them at all times, free access to their parents. Every lawful expedient should be adopted to secure the affections of our children; to induce them to choose our society, enter into conversation with us without embarrassment, and trust us with their own private affairs. I have usually found, the feelings of children preponderate toward a familiarity with their mothers, rather than their fathers. And where, from inattention, from absorption in other matters, or from any seeming austerity and moroseness, children are kept at too great distance from paternal counsels, we have reason to be grateful if God has kindly made up the deficiency in the more accessible and pliant bosom of a cheerful mother.

Beside a constitutional reservedness on the part of many a parent, the difficulty in securing this state of feeling lies in the apparent incompatibility between these habits of familiarity and intimacy, and filial respect and obedience. Children who desire to be respectful to their parents, are afraid of becoming too familiar. And parents who desire to be respected and honored by their children, sometimes insensibly repel their advances to familiarity. In this respect parents are often faulty, and sometimes exceedingly so. There is always a fault in the government of a family, where the children are held in slavish fear of their parents. There may be children whose tempers cannot be controlled by any other means, but they are very rare; and even with these, there is little hope of exerting an influence permanently salutary, so long as they are held in bondage. To gain the confidence, while you restrain the impetuosity of a forward and undutiful child, is a difficult attainment. Here all the kindness, all the discretion, and all the firmness of the parent will be put in requisition. And he will often feel the need of looking up to the Father of lights, for that wisdom, that is profitable to direct. This leads me to remark

4. It belongs to every good system of education, *to maintain a kind and wholesome authority.* The police of a family is of a peculiar kind. The great principle of family government will be found in the comprehensive direction of the

Apostle, "And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." In the maintenance of a happy authority over children, several things are worthy of remark.

To be what it ought to be, the authority of a parent should be *absolute*. "Those who maintain the strictest discipline, give the fewest strokes." It will be seldom necessary that parental authority should be severe, if it is absolute. The will of the parent should be righteous, and then it should be law. Any thing to which the parent cannot freely consent, should be considered as altogether out of the question with the child.

Parental government should never be *capricious*. Some parents exercise their authority only when the fit takes them. At other times, they are foolishly indulgent. Sometimes their authority is so various and mutable, that their children know not where to find them. They announce a precept or prohibition at one time, and without any alteration of circumstances, revoke it at another. Such a government does not deserve the name. It is enough to spoil any child in the world.

Parental authority ought also to be *pre-eminently kind*. Children will often be displeased and angry, when governed; but they ought to find no causes of provocation in their parents. A mild, affectionate government, may be the

most authoritative. If the human heart revolts from restraint, how will it revolt, when the manner of imposing it is rash and unkind. Let the unbounded kindness of a parent be inwoven with every act of discipline, and his government will scarcely fail to influence. The great question to be decided by every act of parental discipline is, *What will be for the best good of the child?* Where a family is small, and especially where there is but a single child, this may safely be the only question.

Parental authority should be established *early*. If it is not established early, it will never be established. When a child has come to sixteen or eighteen years of age, *authority*, bare authority, will not reach him. He must then be under the government of *influence*, or be self-governed, or not governed at all. When I say, therefore, that parental authority should be established early, I mean *very early*. By the time a child can walk, and often before it leaves the breast of its mother, it should be taught implicitly to *obey*. And this lesson it should never forget, until from its years, the parent no longer wishes to govern by the mere force of authority. Let no parent defer the exertion of authority, until his child has become habituated to self-indulgence. If he does, he will find the task difficult, if not altogether impracticable. The early habit of subordination, even to children of unbending dispositions, and impatient of restraint, will

soon become easy, and will be welcomed as profitable. And here I will venture the remark, that it is only in *early life*, that the authority of a parent ought to be maintained by *corporeal chastisement*. I have no doubt of the propriety and importance of this species of correction. God has abundantly sanctioned it in his word and providence. But, then, it is destined for a *child*. When he passes from childhood to fifteen or sixteen years of age, unless for downright impudence or disobedience, the rod, I am disposed to believe, does him injury. If he will not then be governed by reason, and kindness, and influence, he needs a *stronger arm* than the discipline of the domestic circle. Indeed, *all* our efforts to train up our children in the way they should go, exhaust their influence before we are aware of it. The days of *childhood*—these are the seasons, when the character is formed. And if these are neglected, it will be a miracle of mercy, if our children are not lost.

In the maintenance of parental authority, also, it is of the first importance, that the influence of parents should *never come in collision*. "The demon of discord is the deadliest foe to the education of children." On every topic of education, let there be no jarring between the united head of a family. Many a family, who otherwise would be well-governed, is ill-governed, from this single circumstance. The father, for example, is the abettor of theatres and halls,

and the mother is opposed to them ; the father is the foe of dancing and late hours, and extravagant entertainments, and the mother is the friend and abettor of them all ; the father is firm and decided in his authority, and the mother chides him as morose and severe, and the enemy of his children's pleasures ; and the bone of contention is the child they love ; and what wonder, if their authority and their child are sacrificed in the broil, and sacrificed too, for both worlds !

It is an interesting question with every parent to decide, when the government of authority should cease ? Here, too, wisdom is profitable to direct. Every parent must assume the responsibility of this decision, and be governed in it by the disposition of his child, the condition of his family, and not unfrequently by his own condition in life. There are intrinsic difficulties in the government of children, to which no specific principles may in every case be applied. Joyful, and sometimes bitter experience, will teach us lessons every day. And when these difficulties increase, and parents become discouraged, and their hearts sink, let me say to them, never abandon your child, till the last hope is torn from your heart ! And be not quick to decide, that the last hope is gone. The last remedy is patience—*patience—forbearance*, and *hope in God*. This leads me to add,

5. Much is accomplished in the education of

children, by *humble, persevering prayer*. The pride of parents is apt to be concentrated in their children. Parents of some intellectual activity and resolution, and *young* parents especially, are very apt to place great confidence in their own skill, and management, and firmness, in the education of their offspring. This pride in our children, and this confidence in ourselves, may meet with severe trials. And it is often best they should meet with them. No matter how soon parents learn the lesson, that the Lord of heaven and earth holds both them and their children in his hands, as the clay is in the hands of the potter. God means they shall renounce their self-confidence, and feel their dependence upon him. When parents, who have been, in a measure, faithful in the instruction of their children, and vigorous in governing them, see that their children disregard their instructions and authority, and in defiance of all their efforts, remain alienated from God; they will lie prostrate on their faces, and as the last resort, carry their children to the God of all grace and power. And the sooner, the more earnestly, and the more submissively, they do this, the more reason will they have to hope.

Parental tenderness is the most pure, the most faithful, the most unwearied, when it is nourished by prayer. It is at the mercy-seat, that a parent's love all flows out, and without weariness or discouragement. God has done much

to encourage and foster this spirit of prayer for our children. The revelations of his mercy to them are coeval with their need of it. The rite of infant baptism, corresponding as it does so delightfully with the natural relation that exists between parents and children, points the believing parent to God as his only refuge for his offspring. Some parents have had very precious evidence of exercising faith in God in this early devotement of their children. The early hold which they have thus taken of the divine covenant they have never relinquished. When overwhelmed with solicitude for their children, prayer has been their solace. When oppressed with disappointment on their account, they can still look up to the heavens, with the sweet hope that their pure winds will yet breathe, their soft suns arise, and their refreshing rains descend, upon the plants they have so assiduously cultivated. Pious parents may expect their children to lose all their tenderness of conscience and their respect for religion, and to rush into scenes of temptation, when they cease to pray for them. But on the other hand, it is a token for good, it is a sweet presage of mercy to their children, when God pours upon their parents this spirit of grace and supplication.

Daily, in your families, let your children hear you pray, and pray *for them*. At some stated seasons of domestic devotion, perhaps on the Sabbath, let the burden of your prayer be for

the blessing of God upon your children. From time to time, take each of them separately, and go to the throne of grace. Remember them too, often, and particularly, and one by one, in your own private devotions. Frequently set apart days of special prayer for them, and sometimes days of prayer and fasting. There, let the affectionate and faithful father pour out his heart to God for his children, and feel that he cannot let the Angel of the Covenant go, until he bless them. And there, let the trembling mother learn what it is to travail in birth a second time for her children, till Christ be formed in them. There let her wrestle with God and express the ardor of her soul. Not content to plead for restraining grace for her children, let her have confidence to plead with God for his saving mercy, satisfied, that he will, in his own time and way, answer her prayer. And besides these efforts, let the *church of God* awake to the duty of prayer for her children. Through the medium of their parents, their children sustain an interesting relation to God's visible kingdom. Often let them assemble to implead the throne of mercy for their children, and to beg the Hearer of prayer that the spirit of Jesus may sway and melt their hearts.

We say then, that much may be done in the education of children, by humble, believing, persevering prayer. Go and plead for them, as the precious deposit committed to you to train up for heaven. Go and plead for them, as fallen by

their iniquity, and lost without an interest in atoning blood. Go and plead for them as the possessors of an unalienable immortality. Go and plead for them, by all the tenderness of Jesus' love, and by all the agonies of that hour that may separate them from you—from God—from the joys of his right hand. Go and plead for them, by all the hopes of that happy moment, when, if your supplications are answered, you will go up before the throne of judgment and say, "Of those which thou hast given me, I have lost none." But I proceed

III. To speak of the motives which urge to the faithful performance of this duty.

The word of God abounds with injunctions of similar import to that contained in the text. And like every other precept of the Bible, these injunctions are founded on the best of reasons. Among these, the

1. That I shall mention, is the *intrinsic importance of every child*. The poorest, the weakest, the meanest child, is born for immortality. To us, it sometimes appears to possess a short-lived existence, and to be little more than the fading flower, the withering grass, the shooting meteor, or the vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. But notwithstanding this apparent abjectness, there is an importance attached to the existence and character of every child that outweighs the material universe. Even should it never reach the farther horizon of

human life, or advance half way to to its earthly meridian, it is a light that is never extinguished ; a sun, which when once it has risen, never goes down. That little infant possesses a deathless intellect ; and is itself immortal as the Father of spirits. What it may become, what it is destined to become, in this and the future world, no tongue can tell. Moses, Solomon, and Paul, Locke, Newton, and Berkley, were once children. The multitude which are now bowing before the throne, and the multitude which are now lifting up their eyes in torment, were once children. Even during the short period of human life, their minds may become powerfully active ; their views rapidly and astonishingly enlarged ; and the treasures of knowledge which they may amass, may enrich the generations of men. But beyond this short period, when the trifles of the present scene shall be put far away, and stupidity and thoughtlessness shall be superseded by strong and active attention ; when the incessant employment of the mind will be to think and feel ; and when floods of light shall be poured in upon it from all the works, and all the truth of God ; the meanest child will know more, and feel more intensely, than the most enlarged and vigorous mind has ever yet known and felt, this side eternity. How differently will a child appear, when its immortal intellect shall have attained the maturity of another world and shall have been illumined

by the light of eternity, from the abject and insignificant being which it appears to be now ! The soul of every child is a vessel of immense magnitude and capacity, whether it be a vessel of mercy, or a vessel of wrath. This little immortal spirit, as it passes through interminable ages, from one point of its progressive existence to another, is capable of enjoying or suffering more than all intelligent creatures, on earth and in heaven, have yet enjoyed or suffered. When once we endeavor to expand our views to the interminable scenes of futurity, and attempt to follow the most abject of the human family, rising in happiness, or sinking in misery, without mixture and without end; we are overwhelmed at the incomprehensible importance of the meanest child.

You have seen little children die. Never have I felt so keenly and so delightfully, the intrinsic importance of a little child, as when it was torn from my bosom, and its great and gracious Proprietor commanded me to restore it to the dust. Multitudes of those who hear me, have sympathised with this mournful and yet pleasant thought. It is an unspeakable privilege to know, that our children who have gone down to the tomb, were invested with a deathless existence; and that the mournful event which seemed to put a period to their being, has only transmitted them from this narrow dungeon to the wide empire of eternity; - there to

be under a more unerring guardianship, a holier training, and if fitted for heaven, to verify the promise, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, thou hast ordained praise." I have often thought of the destiny of such a child with inexpressible delight; and in its early transition from time, have contemplated it as weathering the storms of these bleak and dangerous shores, even before it was conscious that the tempest raged, or the sky lowered. And when, as our children lie folded in our arms, or grow up under our care, we can consider them as no longer mortal, but immortal; as no longer stupified in ignorance, but advancing toward measures of light, sensibility, and consequence, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; how can we resist the impression, that interests of ineffable magnitude are entrusted to our faithfulness? Could we view them, not only in the light in which they now appear, but the light in which they will appear in future and eternal ages; could we cease to look at them as children merely, and by anticipation that must shortly be realized, regard them in the full manhood of eternity; must we not feel that a deposit of no ordinary value is committed to our guardianship? To educate a youthful prince; to mould the character of the man who is born for empire, and who is himself to mould the character of millions for the present world; what were this, to the responsibility of educating a being

born for immortality, and whose character will bear the impress of your benignant and watchful agency up to the throne of God, or scarred and blighted by your negligence, will go to dwell with devils and the damned! But this leads me to remark,

2. Parents are urged to the faithful discharge of this duty, *by the powerful constraints of the parental relation*. Multitudes who sustain no parental relationship, have felt a deep interest in the welfare of the rising generation, from motives even of a more exalted kind than those which originate in natural affection. But on whom do the unwearied solicitude and pains of all that early nurture, which issues in usefulness and respectability of character, and eternal life, so naturally devolve, as on parents? The immortal beings who thus solicit your care; who thus reach forth their hands to be conducted in the way of life; and who, with such silent, but persuasive eloquence, plead with you to educate them for a happy eternity, are *your own*. They are not orphans; they are not the offspring of that bleak and desolating philosophy that would freeze the warm charities of human life, and pour upon the earth a population of strangers, whom nobody knows and for whom nobody cares, and who wander to their graves without one expression of parental love. No; they are *your children*. The sweet names of *father* and of *mother* dwell daily on their tongue. And

notwithstanding all their childish and youthful waywardness, they prize the tender relation. To be suspected spurious, would mortify them; to become orphans, they would weep; and your oft-frequented grave would tell how they loved you. To you they bear a relation they bear to no other beings,—a relation at once honorable and delightful—a relation of which God is the author, and his Spirit the sanctifier. Nor let it ever be forgotten that the great design of God in this merciful arrangement, was the moral and religious culture of the rising generation. *Did he not make ONE? Yet had he the residue of the Spirit. And wherefore ONE? That he MIGHT SEEK A GODLY SEED.* Little does that man know the evils, or appreciate the guilt of violating this arrangement, who trifles with the sacredness of the marriage vow, and sends forth upon this cheerless, benighted world, a supposititious progeny. Purity, affection and order in human society; above all, the religious education of the young, are so dependent upon a rigid observance of the law that interdicts licentiousness; that the man who infringes on this moral arrangement sports with the best interests of his fellow men in time and eternity. In vain do we look for an intelligent, virtuous, religious generation where human society is addicted to this debasing and unhallowed indulgence. He who formed the first human pair in Eden; he who has sanctified and blessed the marriage covenant in every age

of time; he who "hath set the solitary in families," and made them "the joyful parents of children;" has committed to the bosom of parental love the jewels from which he means to adorn his crown. He appreciates your children. *Lo, children are the heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward.* Your children are his property; he made them for himself; and when he committed them to your affectionate care, he did it as the best expedient his wisdom had devised for the existence and perpetuity of a holy generation of men. With all their frailty and ignorance, with all their moral corruption and responsibility, with all their immortality, and all their capacity for enjoyment and suffering, they are entrusted to the faithful love and nurturing care of parents. And when the God of heaven says, as he virtually says to every parent, "Take this child, and nurse it *for me*," how tender the obligation to preserve the trust inviolate! Children have strong claims on parental *sympathy* for this Christian training. Are your children frail? That frailty they derived from you. Have they imperfections? How strongly they resemble you! Have they peculiarities of character which afflict and embarrass you? See if they did not derive them from you. Are they morally and altogether depraved? How certain it is that you have *begotten them in your own likeness!* Do parents love their children? Shall some disinterested individual sympathise

in their wants and woes, while the heart of a parent remains cold and unfeeling as a stone? Shall some "impartial Samaritan bind up the wounds and staunch the sorrows of this guilty being just about to expire" under the mortal plague of sin, while its unfeeling parent passes by on the other side? Was it for the suffering body alone; was it for the vicissitudes of time; was it for the prosperity of their children in this world only; that the God of nature implanted in the parental bosom, the tender and inextinguishable affection for their offspring? An unenlightened, degraded heathen might immolate his child on the altar of some idol deity, or "cause him to pass through the fire unto Moloch;" but what shall be thought of a parent in a Christian land, who by his neglect, or self-indulgence, leaves his child to ten thousand times worse than such an immolation, and plunges him into the lake of fire? The ostrich of the wilderness, whom "God hath deprived of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding, leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them;" but what shall be thought of the still more cruel insensibility of that parent who gives birth to a creature of immortality, and cherishes it for awhile amid the sands of this comfortless world, but forgets that the time is coming when it must break this "mud-walled

cottage," and try, and through parental negligence, try in vain, to wing its way to purer skies.

3. Children who are religiously educated are usually *a distinguished blessing to the church and the world*. What children are to be at a more advanced age, depends on the character they form in childhood. There is no subject of more momentous interest to the world, therefore, than the efforts of parents to educate them in the fear of God. "One generation goeth, and another cometh," and with a rapidity like the eagle's, "when she hasteth to her prey." In a few years, our sons will become the agents in all that is interesting to the church and the world, and our daughters every where exerting a happy, or baleful influence throughout human society. *Our* sun begins to set, *theirs* just begins to rise. Before we are aware of it, we shall be in our graves, or laid aside as useless, and our children occupying our places of labor and business, and exerting our influence and authority. They must increase; we must decrease. The whole face and character of human society, as they will be exhibited in after times, is now receiving the impression which parents enstamp upon it. That whole unformed mass is "proleptically submitted to their control," and presents itself to their hands, like wax to the seal. The impression it now receives, will probably remain the object of admiration or abhorrence, for generations to come.

Here, then, at this most interesting period of their existence—when the earliest and most lasting impressions are made on their minds; when there are the fewest obstacles to a spiritual life; when the soul is most free from those troubles which embitter, those cares which perplex, and those engagements which engross it in subsequent years; when the understanding is docile, the memory tenacious, the fancy vivid, the sensibilities tender, and the character accessible by a thousand avenues which will be closed in maturer age; are parents called on to decide the deterioration and degeneracy, or the improvement and progression of human society, long after they have descended to the tomb. If our children are educated in the fear of God, the happy influence of their moral training will be extended through a long line of descendants, and be diffused far and wide over the earth. Experience teaches us, that in past ages, the religious education of children has exerted a mighty influence on human society. When all the rest of the world were pagans, it was through the religious education of the family of Abraham, that the Jewish nation became a religious people. The gospel, with all its endless train of blessings, has been transmitted through that same people, to us, and other Christian nations of the Gentile world. Who can declare, what had been the present state of the nations, had not the single family of Abra-

ham been brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? What, for a long series of years, gave Scotland and New-England the pre-eminence over all other lands, in piety and morals, but their assiduous attention to the religious education of the young? Let the religious education of children be now neglected, in this our own land, for twenty, or even ten years, and our descendants become Pagans. Nothing could save the land from infidelity. It would not be in the power of all the other means of grace to arrest the progress of moral declension. In a little time, you would see it ravage, without mercy, this fair land, turning every part of it into worse than scenes of degeneracy, and super-inducing an age of darkness, that would accumulate and thicken in a geometrical ratio, from generation to generation. The great foe of God and man solicits no co-operation more powerful, than an "irreligious, ungoverned progeny." And we need not go far to see these remarks verified. Why is it that France and Germany has each become almost a nation of infidels, but for their entire neglect of religious education? And why is it that when you go to the most irreligious places in our own land, you there find that children have been left in ignorance of God? Why is it that when you go to the most religious and moral places, there you find the greatest pains have been taken to imbue the rising generation with the principles of religious truth and

duty? Why is it, that where religion languishes and declines, and iniquity abounds, there religious education has also begun to decline and languish? These inquiries need not be answered. The great enterprise of reforming a corrupt and degenerate age begins in the family. Parents must bring it about by the education of their children. If the axe is laid at the root of the evil, parents must begin the work. It is in the discipline, virtue and religion of the family, that Christian benevolence lays her deepest foundations, and rears her loftiest superstructure for the prosperity and usefulness of future generations. And when from this eminence she looks down upon future ages, she may shout for joy.

Look down the descent of time then, and see what part your children will act, and what spheres they will occupy a few years to come. Upon you it depends whether they shall be a race of men unaccustomed to the salutary restraints of moral principle, or the firm and decided friends of virtue and godliness; whether they shall become the corrupters or purifiers of their species; whether the sweet influence they shall exert shall be like the dew of Hermon, and the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded his blessing; or whether their baleful contamination shall be extended, and go up, and overlay the land like the smoke from the bottomless pit.

There is one more motive to faithfulness in this parental duty, and that is,

4. *The peculiar encouragement addressed to parents in the promise and providence of God.* The original law of Paradise involved the interests and character of the human family in the conduct of their first parents. It is from the violation of this law, that we have heard the sentence, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so, death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." In the second commandment, God says, "I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." Any man who will look at the history of the Jews, and compare it with the history of contemporaneous nations; or will look at the history of nations or families who have felt the benign influence of Christianity, and compare it with the history of heathen nations, or ungodly families in Christian lands; will see this great principle of the divine government in actual operation. It is the *favorable and encouraging influence* of this principle, in regard to the relation which subsists between pious parents and their children, which furnishes so powerful a stimulus to parental faithfulness. God says of the great founder of the Jewish church, "I know

Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord *may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken.*" Again he says, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep my commandments always, that it might be well with them and *with their children forever!*" And again, "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him; and his righteousness *unto children's children.*" "The just man walketh in his integrity; *his children are blessed after him.*" "The generation of the upright shall be blessed." "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour *my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.*" Speaking of his people, God says, "As for me, this is my *covenant* with them, saith the Lord; my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and forever. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and *their offspring with them.*" "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old *he will not depart from it.*" "The *promise* is unto you, and *your children.*" "Believe

on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and *thy house*." The institution of circumcision under the Old, and baptism under the New Testament, recognise the gracious principle which these passages assert. And what is that principle? Obviously, it is that the God of Abraham "*blesses obedient children for the sake of their obedient parents*." The arrangements of his grace and providence recognise the obligations and blessing of the social tie. There are reciprocal claims resulting from this relation which he pronounces of vast importance in his government of this world. He has blended, and almost indissolubly, the immortal interests of parents and children. He holds the parent so far responsible for his child, that the character and salvation of the child are materially affected by the parent. This is the *general principle* of his gracious government. This is God's "chosen method of transmitting the true religion from one generation to another; of continuing a church in the world, and of training up his people for heaven." The children of pious parents are all placed under the operation of this gracious economy. And it is on this broad principle of the divine government, that the encouragement to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, rests. Christian families are the nurseries of the divine kingdom.

Is it objected, that the children of pious

parents are found in fact, to be no more frequently pious than the children of other men? The objection has no foundation in reality. Cast your eyes over the face of human society, and see whether the mass of those who give evidence of piety, are not descendants of a pious ancestry. Very few pious parents can be found, who were not educated in pious families, and who did not early imbibe the great principles of Christian instruction. It is utterly untrue, that the children of pious parents are, in the progress of years, as bad as other persons. To say nothing of the promise of God to parental faithfulness, does it accord with our experience, that "the force of education, which is confessed with respect to every other human character and accomplishment, is of no consequence at all, as to religion?"

Is it objected, that *all the children of pious parents are not pious*? It must be granted that pious parents sometimes have ungodly children. It is not probable that all the children of Abraham were pious, and it is certain that all the children of David were not so. No doubt the great reason of this failure, is the unfaithfulness of parents. But this may not be the only reason. While the Lord of heaven and earth fulfils his promise, according to its true import and extent, and is a God to his people and their seed, he reserves to himself the right

of withholding his grace from some of the children of pious parents. And it is easy for us to see, why the promise should be general and indefinite, and not definite and particular. Parents would abuse it. Children would abuse it. They would rest their hopes on the piety of their parents, without any due impression of their own personal responsibility; and thus this great feature of the divine government, that every man shall be judged according to his own character, would be lost sight of.

But though this is true, and an important truth, this great principle, that pious parents may expect their children to be pious, as a general principle of the divine government, remains unimpaired. And let parents appreciate the force of this encouragement. Encouragement how precious to parents who are faithful; and terrors how fearful, to parents who are faithless? This is a principle which enlists every tender feeling of the human heart, and one of the most important in the government of God. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" "If a son ask bread of him that is a father, will he give him a stone?" Is it so, that the all-wise Governor of the world has lodged the character and happiness of children in the hands of their parents, and that it depends upon their fidelity, whether they shall be holy and happy? By

what more powerful inducement could he govern a world of families, than this? The faithfulness of parents may introduce their children to the purity and joys of God's right hand; while their unfaithfulness may sink them to the pollution and anguish of the eternal pit. By their faithfulness, they may be allured to the felicities of a virtuous life, the triumphs of a believing death, the glories of a welcome judgment, the rewards of a happy eternity; by their unfaithfulness, they may be given up to the miseries of profligacy, and the obduracy of impenitence; they may be doomed to the despair that hovers over the death-bed of the unbelieving, and to the terrors of that day, when the heavens and the earth shall flee before the face of the incensed Judge, and to the keen torments of that abyss where the miseries of all the incorrigible enemies of God shall be everlasting.

Three remarks I may append in now applying this whole subject.

1. *Let pious parents be urged to unwearied effort for the salvation of their children.* Pious parents who feel the great importance of a Christian education, are apt to grow weary. The labor, toil and watchfulness that are necessary in training up a family of children, none I am sure can appreciate, except those who are called to the duty. Sacrifices of every kind,—of earthly comfort, of selfish interests, of health,

and not unfrequently of reputation, parents may be called to make for the sake of their children. Many a grievous trial they may be called to endure. Many a bright prospect may be, for a time, overcast, and many an animating hope extinguished in tears of parental anguish. But we may not be weary in well-doing ; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. There is no real cause of discouragement, because your efforts are not at once crowned with success. If God tries you in the conduct and prospects of your children, he has wise reasons for so doing. He sees you need the trial. Guard your minds against the sources of discouragement, and remember, they do not amount to the dust in the balance, compared with the encouragements and motives God has set before you for the faithful and unwearied performance of your duty. God's time for the conversion of your children, may not be your time. You may seem to labor in vain, and for many a long year ; and yet, may at last, see your children rejoicing in the graces and comforts of piety. Courage, parents ! Courage ! The sorrows that have broken your hearts will be relieved. The tears that have furrowed your cheeks, will be wiped away. You may yet "step lightly on the borders of the grave, and joyfully to heaven," leaving your children to follow you. *He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again*

with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

And even should some hardened, ungrateful child break your heart with ten thousand sorrows, and bring down your gray hairs with many griefs to the grave; you will be spared sorrows and griefs hitherto unknown, if you can look back and see, that not one will remain un comforted by the promises of the gospel through your negligence,—not one will go away into everlasting burnings, through your unfaithfulness.

2. Let this subject *administer a timely and kind reproof, to those parents who are unfaithful in the religious education of their children.* We should criminate the parent who neglected the health and comfort of his child. But have not the minds, and habits, and character of our children, as real a demand on us to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as their corporeal wants have for sustenance? There are few parents before me, who neglect the physical and intellectual cultivation of their children; but are there none who neglect their moral and religious training? I do not know, my friends, how many of you neglect to teach your children to read God's holy word; how many of you neglect to instruct them in the great principles of revealed religion; how many of you neglect to pray with them, and pray for them, and teach them to pray; how many of you neglect to train them in the

nurture and admonition of the Lord. Nor have I a right to affirm, that any one parent in this assembly neglects duties that so obviously commend themselves to his conscience. I do not know but you have the witness within you, that you have endeavored to lead your children in the way of holiness and heaven. I do not know but you have the witness of your faithfulness in the bosoms of your children; and that when you shall be called to meet them at the bar of God, they will feel that it has not been owing to any unfaithfulness on your part, that they are not saved. But if your own consciences condemn you; if any of you judge yourselves to be unfaithful in this great matter; it is unfaithfulness with which God is highly displeased, and which will probably be attended with consequences that will be bitterly felt, and mournfully remembered, forever. He has threatened to visit your iniquity upon your children, unto the third and fourth generation. Yes, he may leave your children, and your children's children, to fill up the measure of their iniquity before your eyes, and you yourselves may live to see them plunge down to death and hell.

Is there an unfaithful parent that hears me? I implore him that the thoughts which have been suggested in this discourse may be allowed to find a place in his bosom. Let him beware

how he stands between God and his blessing upon his children! Let him reform at once. Let him begin to day, to take his children by the hand and conduct them in the paths of holiness and salvation. Let him remember that their childhood will probably furnish him the only opportunity. O ye parents, who neglect God, cast your eyes upon your children. Look at the cradle. Anticipate their progress through this ensnaring world. Look at death and judgment. There you must meet them. And O tell me, will you meet them there with joy? Will you, on the morning of the resurrection, and at the gate of heaven, greet these sons and daughters with a smile?

3. We also see, on reviewing our subject, *the high obligations of children, for pious and faithful parents.* It is one of the darkest omens in the prospects of the children of pious parents, when they are left to despise the instructions and prayers of those who have done so much to draw down the divine blessings upon their head. My young friends, it will be but a short period that you can enjoy the high privileges of a religious education. You and your parents must soon part, and perhaps forever. Many of you have known your parents in the prime and vigor of their days. But their sun already begins to descend. Soon the wind will pass over them, and they will be gone, and the places that now

know them, will know them no more. They may indeed be your survivors; for the early shadows may gather around the bright morning of your existence, and your sun may go down before it is noon. But should they survive you or not, I beg you to appreciate their solicitude and faithfulness, while you enjoy it. Believe me, you will weep and mourn at your negligence, when you see them deposited in the dust. Then you will justify their severest discipline. You will be ashamed, and humbled, that you ever questioned the purity of their motives in their conduct toward *you*. You will feel as though you wanted to call them up from their grave, once more to ask their forgiveness. Many a time have I said within myself, since I deposited my beloved and honored parents in the dust, O that I could now recall my parents' counsel and my parents' prayers! Beloved youth! bear with me. I know the anxiety of a father's bosom. In the name and in the behalf of your parents, I come to-day to bespeak *your* love, your reverence, your dutiful and respectful deportment. Is there a careless, licentious youth here, over whom some distressed and grief-worn parent is mourning in the bitterness of her soul; let me implore him to staunch those wounds his rashness and folly have inflicted, and pour in the balm which will be like life from the dead. *Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days*

may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. I have lived long enough to see many a delightful fulfilment of this promise, and many a tremendous execution of this implied threatening. In this guilty metropolis, this vortex of youth, where popular feeling and the maxims of the world array themselves so fearfully against domestic discipline, I have seen many an unwary youth glide down the current! I have watched the movements of an all-pervading providence, as they followed, and overtook, and scathed the head of many a contemner of domestic authority, and consigned him to a premature and ignominious grave. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord; FOR THIS IS RIGHT.*

But I come to claim more than this. I solicit your hearts, your lives, your existence for him who made you and bought you with his blood. It is to your father's God, to whom we beg you to consecrate the bud and flower, the dawn and glory of your being. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.* Is there some thoughtless despiser of the great salvation here, over whom the happy spirit of some departed mother is now bending from the courts of heaven to see, after so long a separation, what has become of the son of her vows; let me say to him, whence the infatuation that drives thee on to ruin and despair? Say not this is a

phantom that floats in the imagination of the preacher. O sport not with that at which sainted spirits in glory weep. Let it not be said that you were nurtured in the lap of piety only for the society and employment of fiends. Let not that note of triumph ever be heard in the world of darkness, that a child of so many prayers and tears has become the son of perdition.

THE END.

